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TAMPONS AND MENSTRUAL HYGIENE PRODUCTS

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BASICS

DESCRIPTION

- Menstruation is a major stage of puberty in girls, usually starting at any age between the ages of 8 and 13.
- Women usually lose 1–4 Tbs (<80 mL) blood during normal menstrual period.
- A wide variety of menstrual hygiene products are available. They are available in 2 major categories:
 - Reusable
 - Disposable
- Menstrual hygiene products include:
 - Menstrual pads
 - Tampons
 - Menstrual cup
 - Padded panties
 - Sea sponges
 - Miniform
- Menstrual pads are used as a protective cover outside the vagina, to absorb menstrual flow; available in a wide variety of sizes, shapes, and brands.
- Maxi pads are for heavy days and mini pads or panty liners for light days:
 - With wings:
 - Pros: Keeps pads in place
 - Cons: Can abrade inner thigh
 - Without wings
 - Thong-shaped
 - Small, medium, large, hourglass shapes
 - Tube shape with straight sides
- Can be with:
 - Deodorant:
 - Pros: Smells good
 - Cons: Can cause local irritation
 - Nondeodorant:
 - Pros: Odor indicates vaginal infection and shouldn't be masked
 - Cons: No artificial smell

- Different sizes:
 - Regular maxis
 - Super maxis: Longer than standard pad for extra protection overnight or for heavy flow days
 - Thin maxis: Thinner than typical pad
 - Ultra-thin maxis: Even thinner than thin maxis; may have absorbent gel; useful for lighter-flow days
- Tampons are finger shaped devices used inside the vagina to absorb menstrual flow, are also available in a wide variety of sizes, shapes, and brands.
 - They are considered as medical devices by the FDA and require label with absorbency standards.
 - Pros:
 - More comfortable than pads,
 - Cosmetically appealing and can be worn during activities such as swimming and gymnastics
 - Cons:
 - Risk of TSS
 - Requires changing every 4–6 hours
 - Can cause irritation/discomfort/dryness
 - Learning curve for insertion and removal can cause clogging of sewer if flushed down the toilet.
 - Incidence of UTIs reported in 1 study to be significantly higher among tampon users than among pad users.
 - Available with a choice of applicators:
 - Plastic
 - Cardboard
 - Assembly required
 - None
 - Absorbencies as defined by FDA:
 - Light: ≤ 6 g of fluid
 - Regular: 6–9 g of fluid
 - Super: 9–12 g of fluid
 - Super Plus: 12–15 g of fluid
 - Ultra: 15–18 g of fluid

- FDA guidelines for decreasing the risk of contracting TSS:
 - Follow package directions for insertion
 - Choose the lowest absorbency for your flow
 - Change your tampon at least every 4–8 hours
 - Consider alternating pads with tampons
 - Don't use tampons between periods
 - Avoid tampon usage overnight when sleeping
 - Know the warning signs of TSS such as fever with chills, vomiting, diarrhea, dizziness
- Menstrual cup is a barrier, either inverted bell shape or diaphragmlike device, to collect menstrual fluid.
 - Pros:
 - Economical
 - Can be worn for 12 hours
 - Environmentally friendly
 - Comes in different sizes
 - Cons:
 - User must wash hands prior to use
 - Can be messy
 - Can leak
 - Needs proper cleaning and storage
 - Risk of TSS not well established, as product is not widely used
- Padded panties have washable absorbent pads, are economical, preferred alternative for allergies to synthetic materials used in disposable pads.
 - Not frequently used in US
- Sea sponges are ancient practical alternative to absorb menstrual flow
 - Pros:
 - Cost effective
 - Intravaginal absorbent
 - Environmentally friendly
 - Easy to use
 - Cons:
 - User needs to wash hands prior to use
 - Need to boil prior to use
 - Can leak and be messy
 - Risk of TSS not well established, as product is not widely used
 - Needs proper cleaning and storage

- MiniForm is a small pad designed to fit between the labia minora.
- Pros:
 - Small size
 - Discrete
 - For light days or tampon backup
 - Risk of TSS not well established, as product is not widely used
 - Company is exploring use for incontinence, and as a diagnostic testing mechanism for HPV
- Cons:
 - Absorbs small amount of fluid
 - May be displaced during movement
 - Needs frequent changing
 - Costly
 - Not widely available

Pediatric Considerations

- Choice of menstrual hygiene products is a matter of personal preference, and many young adolescents choose to learn to use tampons even with the 1st menstrual period.
- For more information on TSS and or menstrual TSS see Septic Shock and Toxic Shock Syndrome.

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MISCELLANEOUS

ABBREVIATIONS

- FDA—U.S. Food and Drug Administration
- TSS—Toxic Shock Syndrome



PATIENT TEACHING

- Many girls are interested in using tampons from the onset of menarche.
- Mothers or other family may be concerned about tampons affecting virginity:
 - Reassurance
 - Assurances of normalcy

- Inability to use tampons:
 - Anxiety and vaginismus vs. hymenal abnormality
 - A guide to 1st tampon use at <http://www.youngwomenshealth.org>
 - Wikihow:
 - How to know when you're ready to start using a tampon at: <http://www.wikihow.com/Know-when-You%27re-Ready-to-Start-Using-a-Tampon>
 - How to use a tampon at: <http://www.wikihow.com/Use-a-Tampon/>

PREVENTION

- Imperforate hymen should be noted in delivery room or neonatal nursery.
- Hymenal variants and abnormalities should be detected by primary clinician in prepubertal years.